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Christian stirrings turned KGB spy

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Stanislav Alexandrovich Levchenko is The Spy Who Knew Too Much. He knew too much about his own heart and the rest of the world to continue being an excellent operative in Japan for the KGB, the Soviet Union's agency of terror and espionage.

Levchenko said Christian stirrings from his youth were partly responsible for his rejection of the Soviet system. As a young man, after serving in the GRU,

Levchenko had been forced to join the KGB. In despair at the cynicism there, he sought religion to find some hope. Christian ethics and morality seemed to be sound guideposts for behavior.

However, his work put him in conflict with his faith, so he chose to immerse himself in his work to avoid the inner turmoil. Even in Japan, he continued to attend a Russian Orthodox church whenever he could.

Finally, unable to stand the KGB any longer, and faced with the prospect of returning to the Soviet Union, Levchenko defected on a drizzly October eve-

ning in 1979, walking into the American armed forces' Sanno Hotel in Tokyo's Akasaka district and announcing to a startled U.S. Navy officer that he was seeking political asylum.

Recently, in tailored bush jacket and looking more like a sassy American foreign correspondent than an ex-major in the KGB, Levchenko told editors of The Washington Times that Japan was and is a prime target for Soviet espionage.

"Japan is a cow for them which they try to milk because it is No. 2 GNP-wise in the Free World," Levchenko said.

"Some analysts say that if everything goes as it is going now in the Japanese economy, by the year 2000, probably, GNP-wise, it will be No. 1. Japan has the technical knowledge and high potential with people who are talented and skillful. So the Soviets want the Japanese product."

Levchenko said that since Japan has no espionage law and scant controls on passing intelligence, getting secrets from Japanese industry and government is an easy touch: like taking sushi from a baby.

Levchenko is a sawed-off James Bond (Sean Connery) look-alike who speaks English with an American twang that has corrupted the proper "British" English he learned in Moscow.

Reporters are as cynical as spies. So the inevitable question: "How do we know, Mr. Levchenko, that you are not still a Soviet agent, not a deep plant for the KGB?"

Levchenko draws on a long filter cigarette and waits to frame his reply. He doesn't particularly like or dislike the question. He has heard it before. He understands that it must be asked because of the virtual unbelievability of the defection of a high-ranking KGB officer.

"I have taken numerous polygraph tests and caused the KGB and the Soviet Union so much trouble that everyone is satisfied I am clean," Levchenko said.

The Soviet Union sentenced him to death in absentia in 1981, and he left behind his beautiful wife, Natalia, and his 10-year-old son when he defected. He is not

nervous moving about Washington and Los Angeles but acknowledges that he could be an assassination target for a vengeful Moscow.

Why is Japan so lenient in prosecuting some of the agents whom Levchenko developed and then fingered in an effort to show the Japanese public what was going on?

"To bring a spy case to the court, especially in Japan, you've got to have a lot of documented evidence, because they don't have a strong espionage law," Levchenko said.

"They can prosecute people in espionage cases for two reasons: First, they have a government employees law with a statute of limitations of three years. The second law is a foreign exchange law. The statute of limitations is also three years. Most of these cases are 3½, four or five years old. So, lack of material evidence and statutes of limitations — these are the main reasons. The editor-in-chief of Sankei Shimbun, which is a very solid, respectable conservative newspaper — in Japan it's No. 5, but in Japan No. 5 means 3.5 million copies a day — resigned, he had to go because he was too close to the KGB. The Japanese mass media take this very seriously."

How about the response of the American press?

"The American mass media was, as you know, silent for six months," Levchenko said. "That's a very unusual thing. It was a very big thing in Japan, but no word in the American mass media, probably because it was too complicated a story."

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